



Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

Doctrinal Catechesis Sessions for adults based on
the Church Year, the Liturgy, & the Sunday Scriptures

Breaking Open the Word

by Mary Birmingham

4th Sunday of Easter | Year C



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Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Opening Prayer

Option 1. Use Opening Prayer from the Sunday Liturgy.

Option 2.

Prayer

*God of mercy,
You wash away our sins in water,
You give us new birth in the Spirit,
And redeem us in the blood of Christ.
As we celebrate Christ's resurrection
Increase our awareness of these blessings,
And renew your gift of life within us.
We ask this through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son,
Who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
One God forever and ever.*

[Second Sunday of Easter, Morning Prayer, Christian Prayer: The Lit

**Catholic
Faith, Life
& Creed**
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Breaking Open the
Word worksheets
connect with *Catholic
Faith, Life, & Creed*
Doctrinal Sessions.

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Liturgical Context

- ▶ The entire Easter season is a remembrance made present of Christ's Paschal Mystery—the life, death, resurrection, ascension and sending of Christ's Spirit to the world. An entire season is set aside for this reflection. The Fourth Sunday of Easter each year focuses on Jesus, the Good Shepherd.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, and then surface insights in the wider group.

- ▶ What spoke to your heart in today's liturgy?
- ▶ What reading, symbol, music, homily, spoke to you and why did it speak to you?
- ▶ What touched you the most in today's Gospel?

If time is a consideration, omit reflection on one of the readings.

First Reading: Acts of the Apostles 13:14, 43-52

- ▶ Paul was invited to preach in the Jewish synagogue in Pisidia.
- ▶ The leaders of the community became jealous.
- ▶ A familiar pattern began to emerge. Paul preached to the Jews, they rejected him and so he took his message to the Gentiles.
- ▶ Once taken to the Gentiles new communities were formed consisting of Gentile believers.
- ▶ They in turn were persecuted by the Jews.
- ▶ Paul continued to preach to Gentiles. He reminded them that the Christian message was first intended for the house of Israel to fulfill in response to God's covenant and their election. They were heirs to the long-awaited Messiah.
- ▶ The Word of God would go forward. Nothing could stop God's word from accomplishing what God intends. People will accept the Word or they will reject it, but it will go forward.
- ▶ When Paul and Barnabas shook the dust from their feet they were in a sense calling them pagans. Jews, when returning from pagan lands shook the dust of the pagan land from their feet. Paul and Barnabas hurl this insulting invective at the Jews.



Mystagogy reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, and then surface brief insights in the wider group. Catechist responds with a “brief” story from his or her life. See appendix #1 for an example.

- ▶ How can this reading be a word for you today?
- ▶ Our modern culture has coined a phrase that means the same as trying to convert

someone who is already converted, or trying to convince someone of something who is already a fan and believes what you are trying to convince them of in the first place. That phrase is: "preaching to the choir." Paul should have been preaching to the choir when it comes to preaching the message of Christ to the Jews. They should have gotten it! Have you ever tried to convince someone of something you are passionate about only to be surprised that they were not as passionate as you? Imagine how it was for those first evangelists. What does Paul have to teach us today when it comes to the ministry of evangelization?

Second Reading: Revelation 7:9, 14b-17

- ▶ The risen, exalted Christ who sits on the throne of glory is the star of the Book of Revelation.
- ▶ Christ affirms the seven churches, and then warns them about the fight between good and evil that will surely come.
- ▶ Today's reading also exalts all who have shed their blood in service of the Gospel. Martyrs share in the passion and death of Christ by the sacrifice of their own lives. Today's reading alludes to the Shepherd who will lead to living streams.
- ▶ John's first vision was in reference to Israel. The more expansive vision is universal—to all the nations.
- ▶ The waving of palm fronds was a sign of victory.
- ▶ The great trial is the great tribulation that will occur at the end of time. At that time God's people will experience tremendous suffering and persecution.
- ▶ Robes are a symbol for the inner house of the person—the spiritual dimension of their lives. Dirty robes are a sign of sin, purest white, clean robes conversely are a sign of holiness.
- ▶ Jesus' death is associated with the holiness of the pure white, clean robes. Through the death and resurrection of Christ, the interior life is washed clean.
- ▶ This takes place through baptism—all are washed clean by the blood of the Lamb.
- ▶ The evangelist calls all believers to persevere to the end.



Mystagogy reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two and then surface brief insights in the wider group. Catechist responds with a "brief" story or reflection from his or her life. See appendix #2 for an example.

- ▶ What does it mean to you to persevere to the end?
- ▶ What is the present state of your robe? Does it feel washed clean, pure and white, or a touch soiled? What is the Good News in this reading?

Gospel: John 10:27-30

Read or summarize the Gospel, perhaps provide a copy of the text for further reflection.

Gospel Exegesis

Please note: catechist may intersperse the questions at the end of the exegesis throughout your presentation where appropriate.) Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions before presenting the exegesis.

- ▶ What specifically touched you in this Gospel?
- ▶ What does this Gospel mean to you?

- ▶ Today's Gospel is one of two shepherd stories in John's Gospel.
- ▶ The first focuses on the Shepherd, this focuses on the sheep.
- ▶ The shepherd will safeguard the sheep. He will keep them from harm and not allow them to be taken away from him. The sheep will enjoy the rewards of everlasting life.
- ▶ The sheep presently live the reality of heaven—they are in relationship with their Master here and now. This is called realized eschatology. Salvation both now and not yet.
- ▶ All who listen to the voice of the Master will be saved on the last day.
- ▶ John tells this story and the entire tenth chapter in the shadow of the Jewish Feast of Dedication which commemorated the desecration of the Temple, the later Jewish martyrs who believed they were giving their lives in service of God's people and the gathering of God's people into one nation.
- ▶ John believes that Jesus is the fulfillment of that feast.
- ▶ The sheep hear the voice of the Master and respond. The message is clear. All who hear the voice of Christ and respond will be gathered as one and will enjoy everlasting life. God will always care for his sheep.
- ▶ Jesus' willingly sacrificed his life for his sheep.
- ▶ Christians came to understand Jesus' sacrificial death as salvation for all.
- ▶ So powerful a sacrifice it was that the alienation between God and human beings came to an abrupt halt as he drew his last breath on the cross.
- ▶ Jesus took away the sins of all the sheep. He was the Lamb that sacrificed his life for his sheep.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in small groups of four. Use the last three or four minutes to surface the insights in the wider group. Catechist begins by sharing story from his or her life. See appendix #3 for an example.

- ▶ What one thing struck you about the Shepherd/sheep motif?
- ▶ In what way do you see yourself as a sheep?
- ▶ In what way is Jesus Shepherd of your life?

Catechist invites participants to silently reflect on the following question.

- ▶ After reflection on today's liturgy, what one thing is God asking of you at this time in your life?
- ▶ What obstacles stand in the way of following God's call?

Concluding Prayer

Option 1. Celebrate a minor rite—an exorcism or blessing for catechumens: RCIA 90-97

Option 2. Pray the Prayer of Pope Clement

Option 3. Other suitable, but brief prayer. (Perhaps pray the Prayer of St. Francis.)

Prayer of Pope Clement XI

Lord, I believe in you: increase my faith.

I trust in you: strengthen my trust.

I love you: let me love you more and more.

I am sorry for my sins: deepen my sorrow.

I worship you as my first beginning.

I long for you as my last end.

I praise you as my constant helper.

And I call you as my loving protector.

I want to do what you ask of me:

In the way you ask, for as long as you ask, because you ask it.

Let me love you Lord as my God.

And see myself as I really am: a pilgrim in this world.

A Christian called to respect and love all those lives I touch.

APPENDIX

#1. I have an acquaintance in my life who often reminds me of the Jews in relation to Christ. Every exciting new possibility is met with cynicism and doubt as the first line of defense. If it sounds too good to be true—for this person---indeed it is! If it is a new and exciting approach to anything in the Church---evangelization, teaching—no matter what the context, the attitude always is, “I won’t believe it until I see it.” Such an attitude is incredibly frustrating and de-energizing when trying to empower people to embrace exciting new ventures. There is always one person who says, “No, it isn’t so. No, it cannot be done. No, I am not interested! No. No. No.” Paul and company experienced “no” when they should have been hearing “YES!” No wonder he shook the dust from his feet. Shame on those who should have believed and didn’t! They should have seen the Christ who was right under their noses. Paul reminds me not to be one of the naysayers, but to see with eyes of faith! Thank God he shook the dust and took his message to all who would listen. I hope I am never counted among those who refuse to see what is right under my nose!

#2. I was listening to a wonderful retreat master the other day. He was sharing that a sign of true inner holiness—those white robes—is when we can acknowledge our sinfulness, and be content when affirmation and praise is not showered upon us. He insists that the human condition is such that we are in constant pursuit of affirmation and self-worth. We do not believe in our own self worth—we need others to ramp it up and constantly tell us how wonderful we are! He said true holiness occurs when we can look within and acknowledge our faults, not be buried by them and own what is good but simply participate in the life of God that is within us.

I find great wisdom in his words. Full time ministry can be a series of messages for the insatiable spoiled inner child. That child is either told that she is wonderful or that she is worthless. We hear such messages in our work with people every day. The white robe of holiness invites me to let go of the need to be affirmed—to accept what is—to acknowledge my sins and limitations and concentrate on my Easter life with God.

I have grown somewhat in this endeavor but I have a long way to go. Someone made a hurtful comment to me not to long ago. I found that I did not react as negatively as I used to react. Yes I was hurt. I allowed myself to experience the hurt but I did not dwell on it. I asked myself what I needed to hear, and then moved on. The retreat master insists that when we grow in holiness such situations will roll off of us and will not rob us of our peace.

#3. Sheep are helpless creatures. If they get stuck in a thicket, they just stand there and cry. They do nothing to help themselves. They need a Master if they are to survive in the wilderness. I see myself as dependent on the mercy of God simply to function in life. I too can back myself into a thicket and simply stand there unable to move forward or backward—paralyzed by my options.

I, like sheep, cry for help. The Master is always there to pull me out of the thicket. It is not until the situation passes that I am able to see his handiwork. That is why memory is so important. We remember the great deeds of God in order to sustain us when we seem to be powerless and without hope.

Right now I am making a decision to turn a situation in my life over to God. The situation is not getting any better. But I have come to the realization that I am powerless over it. Only God has the wisdom and the wear-with-all to bring this situation to a positive outcome. All my efforts would simply fail.

My job is simply to be faithful--to do what I am able to do, then allow God to take over. I always think I can fix any situation. I seldom can. When I am able to abandon my life to God's care and truly let go, things always work out better in the end. Sheep know this. They simply wait and let the Master come and rescue them.



Connecting Liturgy with Catholic Doctrine

Possible doctrinal themes that flow from this week's
Liturgy of the Word and Eucharist

Eucharist Series
Sacraments
Salvation
Symbols of Bread and Wine

Evangelization
Ecumenism
Church
Revelation I or II

Other themes may be chosen as well--choose from the scope and sequence chart and create your own connecting statement. The following statements make the appropriate connections between the doctrinal issue you have chosen and the liturgy of the day.

EUCCHARIST SERIES: Part IV

Easter is to the year what Sunday is to the week. Our premier celebration of the Paschal Mystery—the life, passion, death, resurrection, ascension sending of the Spirit is made manifest and re-presented for us in the Eucharistic liturgy. For the next four weeks we will break open the four parts of the Mass. Today we will focus on part IV, the Liturgy of the Word.

SACRAMENTS

The Paschal Mystery is made manifest in the Easter season. Easter is an appropriate time to reflect on the way in which Jesus continues his saving mission in the midst of his absence. Thus, today the doctrinal session will focus on the doctrinal issue of SACRAMENTS.

SALVATION

Jesus is the Good Shepherd who came to save the world from sin. He lays down his life for his sheep. This salvation was ordained since the beginning of the world and it is fulfilled in the Christ event. Today's session will focus on salvation.

SYMBOLS OF BREAD AND WINE

The Paschal Mystery is made manifest in the Easter season. Easter is an appropriate time to reflect on the mystery of Christ's death, resurrection, ascension and sending of the Spirit to which we are given access in the liturgy. We experience the paschal mystery of Christ in the Eucharistic liturgy in the breaking of the bread and sharing of the Eucharistic cup. Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. We share in the broken Body of the Lamb at every Eucharistic feast. Thus today's doctrinal session will focus on the SYMBOLS OF BREAD AND WINE—the symbols of the Eucharist.

EVANGELIZATION

Today's first reading is a reminder that we like Paula re called to go out and preach the Good News. We are called to go out and establish the kingdom of God and preach the Good News to all nations. The Church teaches us what we need to know about this very worthy enterprise. Today's session will focus on EVANGELIZATION.

CHURCH

Today's Gospel affirms Jesus as the Good Shepherd. He is the Shepherd of his flock, the Church. Throughout the Easter season the Acts of the Apostles relates the story of the development of the fledgling Church. It logically flows that today's liturgy invites further reflection on the CHURCH. Thus, today the doctrinal session will focus on the doctrinal issue of CHURCH and its STRUCTURE.

ECUMENISM

Paul set out to evangelize Israel. Israel rejected the message. Paul then took his message to the Gentiles—to the entire world. We are called to foster a spirit of Christian unity when it comes to the universal message of salvation in Christ. Thus, today's session will focus on ecumenism.

REVELATION Part I or II

What better time is there than Easter season to focus our attention on God's revelation to humanity? The second reading particularly focuses on God's revelation. Today's session will focus on God's revelation.